1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22



We have not enumerated them, for their names are irrelevant. The fighting between the two peoples has been incessant from time immemorial and seems to have reached a state of equilibrium before European conquest upset it. (Malte-Brun's map compared with modern maps suggests that tribal positions have not greatly altered since 1860.) In the earlier part of the historic period, from about 1840 to near the end of the century, Nuer appear to have been expanding in search of new grazing, but continued raiding for cattle, an aggressive action which we attribute to the structural relations between the two peoples, but which was, no doubt, intensified by rinderpest.

Though Dinka relations with Nuer are extremely hostile and war between them may be called an established institution, they have, nevertheless, united occasionally to make war against the Egyptian Government and there have sometimes been joint social gatherings. In times of famine Dinka have often come to reside in Nuerland and have been readily accepted and incorporated into Nuer tribes. In times of peace, also, Dinka visited their relations who had been captured or who had settled in Nuerland, and, as remarked earlier, there seems in parts to have been some trade between the two peoples. The strands of social relationships of a general kind, which are often numerous across the boundaries of adjacent Nuer tribes and which stretch across Nuerland, are thus prolonged weakly beyond the limits of Nuerland in occasional and hazardous contacts with foreigners.

All Dinka come into the category of *Jaang*, and Nuer feel that category to be nearer to themselves than other categories of foreigners. These foreign peoples, with all of whom the Nuer have reached a state of balanced hostility, an equilibrium of opposition, expressed occasionally in fighting, are, with the exception of the Beir, generally classed as *Bar*, cattleless people or people possessing very few cattle. A further category are the *Jur*, cattleless people whom the Nuer regard as lying on the periphery of their world, such as the Bongo-Mittu group of peoples, the Azande, the Arabs, and ourselves. However, they have separate names for most of these peoples.

We have remarked that Nuer feel Dinka to be nearer to themselves than other foreigners, and in this connexion we draw

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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What does a Nuer mean when he says, 'I am a man of such-and-such a *cieng*'? *Cieng* means 'home', but its precise significance varies with the situation in which it is spoken. If one meets an Englishman in Germany and asks him where his home is, he may reply that it is England. If one meets the same man in London and asks him the same question he will tell one that his home is in Oxfordshire, whereas if one meets him in that county he will tell one the name of the town or village in which he lives. If questioned in his town or village he will mention his particular street, and if questioned in his street he will indicate his house. So it is with the Nuer. A Nuer met outside Nuerland says that his home is *cieng Nath*, Nuerland. He may also refer to his tribal country as his *cieng*, though the more usual expression for this is *rol*. If one asks him in his tribe what is his *cieng*, he will name his village or tribal section according to the context. Generally he will name either his tertiary tribal section or his village, but he may give his primary or secondary section. If asked in his village he will mention the name of his hamlet or indicate his homestead or the end of the village in which his homestead is situated. Hence if a man says '*Wa ciengda*', 'I am going home', outside his village he means that he is returning to it; if in his village he means that he is going to his hamlet; if in his hamlet he means that he is going to his homestead. *Cieng* thus means homestead, hamlet, village, and tribal sections of various dimensions.

The variations in the meaning of the word *cieng* are not due to the inconsistencies of language, but to the relativity of the group-values to which it refers. I emphasize this character of structural distance at an early stage because an understanding of it is necessary to follow the account of various social groups which we are about to describe. Once it is understood, the apparent contradictions in our account will be seen to be contradictions in the structure itself, being, in fact, a quality of it. The argument is here introduced in its application to local communities, which are treated more fully in the next chapter, and its application to lineages and age-sets is postponed to Chapters V and VI.

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A man is a member of a political group of any kind in virtue of his non-membership of other groups of the same kind. He sees them as groups and their members see him as a member of a group, and his relations with them are controlled by the structural distance between the groups concerned. But a man

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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does not see himself as a member of that same group in so far as he is a member of a segment of it which stands outside of and is opposed to other segments of it. Hence a man can be a member of a group and yet not a member of it. This is a fundamental principle of Nuer political structure. Thus a man is a member of his tribe in its relation to other tribes, but he is not a member of his tribe in the relation of his segment of it to other segments of the same kind. Likewise a man is a member of his tribal segment in its relation to other segments, but he is not a member of it in the relation of his village to other villages of the same segment. A characteristic of any political group is hence its invariable tendency towards fission and the opposition of its segments, and another characteristic is its tendency towards fusion with other groups of its own order in opposition to political segments larger than itself. Political values are thus always, structurally speaking, in conflict. One value attaches a man to his group and another to a segment of it in opposition to other segments of it, and the value which controls his action is a function of the social situation in which he finds himself. For a man sees himself as a member of a group only in opposition to other groups and he sees a member of another group as a member of a social unity however much it may be split into opposed segments.

Therefore the diagram presented on p. 114 illustrates political structure in a very crude and formal way. It cannot very easily be pictured diagrammatically, for political relations are relative and dynamic. They are best stated as tendencies to conform to certain values in certain situations, and the value is determined by the structural relationships of the persons who compose the situation. Thus whether and on which side a man fights in a dispute depends on the structural relationship of the persons engaged in it and of his own relationship to each party.

We need to refer to another important principle of Nuer political structure: the smaller the local group the stronger the sentiment uniting its members. Tribal sentiment is weaker than the sentiment of one of its segments and the sentiment of a segment is weaker than the sentiment of a village which is part of it. Logically this might be supposed to be the case, for if unity

[See category 11b — Analyst]

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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Nuer consider that lineage cleavage arises from a fundamental cleavage in the family between *gaatgwan*, children of the father, and *gaatmaa*, children of the mother. Where there are two wives and each has sons, the lineage bifurcates from this point. A lineage bifurcation is a polygamous family writ large. *Thok dwiel*, lineage, means this; it is 'the entrance to the hut', the mother's hut. The tiny twigs we see in the *gol*, household, grow into the great branches of the lineages. It is for this reason that lineages are so often named after women, the mothers from whose wombs sprang the different lines of descent. As we understand the process, what happens is that certain lineage groups gain political importance and exclusiveness, becoming nuclei of tribal sections, and that only by so doing is their structural position stabilized and are the points of their bifurcation rendered fixed and permanent points of convergence in lineage structure. This explains how it is that in only a few out of a vast number of polygamous families is maternal descent structurally significant, and why the bifurcation occurs in the lineage where it occurs in the tribe.

This tendency towards co-ordination of territorial segmentation and lineage segmentation can be seen in the various stages of territorial expansion between the household and the tribe. When brothers of an influential family live in different parts of a village and gather around them a cluster of relations and dependants, these hamlet-groups are named after them and they become the point at which the lineage is likely to bifurcate. Thus, if the brothers are called Bul and Nyang, people speak of the *gol* of Bul and the *gol* of Nyang, and if later the grandchildren of one of them move to a different village site the lineage will split into two branches. Such minimal lineages as those pictured in the diagrams on pages 196–7 occupy adjacent villages, or widely separated divisions of the same large straggling village, and make separate camps along the same stretch of river or adjacent camps around a small lake. The points of divergence of lineages from clan trees are thus related to the size and distribution of inhabited sites in a tribal area.

The association of the tribal system with a clan may thus be supposed to influence the form of the lineage structure. We may further emphasize the morphological consistency between

[see cat. 116 — Annotated]

721 reason that the Shilluk have no cattle and they only raid people with cattle.(1) Although in direct contact with the Anuak in the far eastern parts of Nuer territory, tsetse fly and absence of cattle make the area unsuitable for encroachment and the Anuak were only occasionally raided by the Nuer. When rifles were introduced and the Anuak could defend themselves they retaliated with raids on the Nuer. The Burun were occasionally raided by the Nuer for captives. Other communities, Arab and those of the Nuba mountains, were raided only occasionally. Except for the 829 Beir whom the Nuer appear to have respected, and the Dinka whom they fought, most foreign peoples were classed by the Nuer as *Bar*, that is, cattle-less folk, or people possessing few cattle. Another category was *Jur*, cattle-less people whom the Nuer regarded as lying on the outskirts of their world; these included the Azande, Europeans, and the Bongo etc., although the Nuer have differentiating terms for most of them.

POPULATION

161 Official estimate of population is 250,000. Estimates for the
619 various tribes are given approximately as follows by Evans-Pritchard.(2)

THE EASTERN NUER

| The Bahr Nuer | | | | The Zeraf Nuer | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gaajak | Gaawang | Gaajak | Law | Lak | Thiang | Gaawar |
| 42,000 | 7,000 | 42,000 | 33,000 | 24,000 | 9,000 | 20,000 |

THE WESTERN NUER

| Bul | Leek | 3 Western Jikany Tribes | Jagei Tribes | Dok | Thiang |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17,000 | 11,000 | 11,000 | 10,000 | 12,000 | 9,000 |

NOMENCLATURE

101 The Nuer call themselves *Naath*, (sing. *Nath*). The Shilluk, Arabs and Dinka call them *Nuer*. The Nuer also speak of the tribes west of the Bahr el Jebel as *Nath cieng* - 'the homeland Nuer', and of those east of the river as *Nath Lwar* - 'Bush Nuer'.(3)

*THE ATWOT*

000 These appear to be a Nuer tribe, speaking a Nuer dialect, but having adopted many Dinka habits. They are situated in the Lakes district south west of Yirrol, south of the Dinka; they number 31,600 approximately. Little is known of them.

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, p.132.
(2) Ibid, p.117.
(3) Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, 1932, p.297.